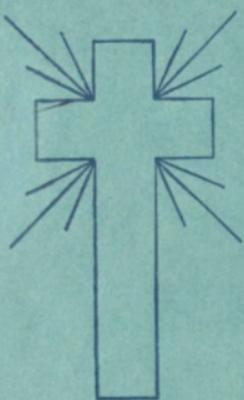


The Work of the Christ in the World To-day



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THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY IN ENGLAND :
12 GLOUCESTER PLACE, LONDON, W.1
1934

Sold by
The Theosophical Press
Wheaton, Illinois

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*A lecture given at the Victoria Hall, London, on
December 13th, 1933, under the auspices of the
Theosophical Society in England.*

IN the *Sunday Times* of London of November 19th, in the column of University news, I read that some students at Oxford were organising a meeting which was to have as one of its topics the theme "the advocation of an experimental belief in Christianity." An "experimental belief" to be given to Christianity in England to-day, in this land of some of the most beautiful cathedrals which the world contains! What has happened, when English youth, represented by University students, look upon Christianity with an eye of scepticism, if not hostility, and question whether there is after all any kind of a message to the individual in the teachings of Christ?

Let me first survey with you very briefly what has happened to the conception of the Christ since the days when He appeared in Palestine. We find that when He moved among His disciples, He was to most of them a kind of elder brother ; very few of them realised constantly anything of His divine nature. As you know, when He passed away and came back, they did not at first recognise Him. He was, however, so loved by them that they felt that He represented the flowering of their idealism.

Then along that line of development we have St. Paul, who never saw Him with his physical eyes, preaching with intense fervour the doctrine of salvation through Christ. But he added the conception that the Christ is, as it were, the type of what all men might become, for St. Paul speaks of the mystical idea of " Christ in you the hope of glory." He proclaims that we must all come some day to the stature of the Christ ; that the Christ is, in His grandeur, as the " first-fruits of them that slept." St. Paul introduces the conception that there is a mystical relation between all men and Christ.

Then comes a later development—later, because some scholars say that St. John's Gospel is distinctly later than the writings of St. Paul—where St. John reveals to us the Christ in a cosmic aspect. Christ

becomes the “Word,” the Divine Reason, the Logos of the Stoics and of Philo “made flesh.” The Logos of the Stoics, the divine order in the universe, was seen by St. John as crystallised in the marvellous personality of Him who walked in Palestine. Such a conception, that the totality of the universe in its splendour and wisdom should become mirrored in a human being, had not been a part of the doctrine of the Stoics ; St. John brings this conception—that of the cosmic Christ—into Christianity.

In the next phase of development the religion passes away from Christ the person, except in a mystical manifestation of Him in the Holy Eucharist. The Church appears on the scene and begins to speak in His name. The Sacraments take the place of Christ, and there is the proclamation that in the Sacrament of the Mass the Christ Himself is present, Christ the Godhead. Somewhere about this time there is added the conception of the Virgin Mary as the mediator between mankind and Christ. Very swiftly on that there follows the further idea of the human priest as the intercessor between man and the Virgin Mary and the Christ. It is clearly recognised in the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church that the priest who performs the ceremony of the Mass puts on for the time being something of the

nature of the Christ. As Christ was both God and man, so the priest is both Christ and priest.

Then come all the movements of the

REFORMATION,

which in the main are an attempt to go back again to the personality of the Christ, away from the Sacraments, away from the Churches, away from the Virgin Mary, away from the priest. From the time of the Reformation there returns once again into Christianity something of the realisation of the personal Christ. This teaching does not tolerate that a mediator should appear between the human soul and the Christ.

But the greatest of mistakes was made at the Reformation—from my point of view, of course—because the reformers did not realise that He who is the Christ may have many, many modes of approach to Him. They did not realise that all the Sacraments, and the great institution of the Church itself, might have been planned by Him as channels of approach; they threw overboard all of them because they considered that such developments stood in the way of man on his road to Christ. There was not in the reformers the fuller realisa-

tion that as a religion develops its Founder stands behind it guiding it; that a religion is not a doctrine uttered once upon a time only; that a religion is not like a cistern of water whence the water once collected flows; that it is far rather like a fountain which, with the pressure of the water underneath, is ever bubbling up so that there arise in each religion new teachings, modes and revelations inspired by the Founder. The leaders of the Reformation, who felt the immediacy of the Christ, did not realise that

. . . the love of God is broader
Than the measures of man's mind,
And the Heart of the Eternal
Is most wonderfully kind.

They did not realise that possibly the Christ was ever to be found in the Holy Eucharist; that possibly there was a truth behind the conception of the Virgin Mary as mediator. All these aspects of Christianity were thrown aside because of the realisation of the personal Christ.

Then came the great change, which is within the memory of you elder people, and that is the challenge to the whole conception of the Christ by the higher criticism. Briefly summed up, the result

of the higher criticism was to challenge the divinity of Christ, for they tore to pieces the background of the idea of a divine inspiration of the Bible. With the discarding of the idea of divine inspiration, there tended to disappear from the teachings of Theological Colleges the accepted idea concerning the Christ, that of His divinity. There were many who had loved the Christ, less for His divinity and more for His magnificent humanity, who could not convince themselves that there was enough historical evidence to show that the miracles took place, and that the various attributes which one associates with the idea of God really existed in the personality of the Christ. But while they might have lost the realisation of His divinity, they, if they truly had loved Him, came to a greater realisation still of the need more than ever for the world of Christ, not as the Divine, but as a magnificent exemplar who concentrated in His nature all the idealisms of the world. It is this human aspect of the Christ, as a man among men, which has fascinated the Oriental mind also ; any one of us in the East who reads the Gospels feels absolutely at home. We understand what it was that He tried to give as His message.

Yet while the conception of Him as a great

example of a glorified manhood is attractive, nevertheless there is a kind of lurking desire in the hearts of many who love Him as the greatest of men to feel Him also as in some way a reflexion of the Divine. For note that all the realisations which we have had concerning the Godhead have all been through some kind of a human being. It is only through a human being's greatness that we rise to a realisation of the nature of Divinity.

Let me now consider the doctrine which most thoughtful Christians will accept, and upon which they try to found a philosophy of life, that Christ is the great exemplar, one who inspires us all in our daily lives because of the daily life which He lived. For from this belief the question arises which is at the root of many Christian movements to-day. It is :

IS THE CHRIST GET-AT-ABLE?

Can He guide us to-day as He guided His disciples 2,000 years ago?

Of course, the answer of the Church is, and always has been, Yes. But He is in Heaven, since His ascension, and not on earth. But when the philanthropically-minded Christian looks at the

problems of this world and of its betterment, the question is not of a Christ in Heaven, but the need of Him here upon earth to give us advice concerning our present-day human problems. Can He tell us what to do? Can He organise our idealisms in the world to-day so that we can carry out His will to make this earth here below as a Heaven? For surely if Christ so loved the world that He gave Himself to save it, He could not limit Himself to give only that once. Would He not, if His love were still full, as it was then, be coming down again and again to earth to save it? Can you imagine anyone of the nature of the Christ, with His heart so full of the love of humanity, remaining in any kind of Heaven, and allowing the world to be as it is? Surely such an one would ever long to be with His children and brothers, to bear their burdens here below?

To me, the question which various Christian movements are attempting to answer is: Can we get into touch with the Christ to-day in this City of London, in this year of grace 1933? Is Christ really "walking upon the water not of Gennesareth but Thames"?

I have come before you to answer that question—and I have not been baptised. You might therefore

well say : How dare you presume to answer this question ? I dare to answer it because I have known the Christ ever since I was a boy, and yet I am not a Christian and only partially a Buddhist, because I am first and foremost a Theosophist. It is because of my Theosophy and my blossoming in Theosophy from boyhood, that, from another line of tradition, I have found Him, and have been serving Him all these years. Now, I shall be making many statements concerning Him and His work in the world, and every one of them can easily be challenged. But I beg you not to feel compelled to accept anything which I say. Examine my thesis as if it were a picture which someone has painted ; if there is anything in it repellent, put the picture aside. But it may be that I open up for some of you a new kind of realisation concerning this great problem of the Christ, in the world to-day.

I have said that throughout the history of Christianity there has been a movement of thought between two conceptions of the Christ as God and as man, somewhat like a pendulum swinging to two extremes. The Church has very wisely blended the two together and stated that He is both God and man. But it is rather difficult for many Christians with critical minds to understand how both can be

true, particularly so when they find that the Gospel stories are not fully substantiated by historical evidence.

There is one vital statement which you will find in all mystical teachings, as also in Christianity, in that of St. Paul to some measure, that the nature of the Divine is in us men. I wonder how many of you recollect the criticism that the orthodox Jews made of Christ when He proclaimed that He was God? His answer was to refer His critics to those words in the *Psalms* which they all venerated: "I said ye are Gods and the children of the Most High." It is that teaching, that something of Christ's nature is in us, which was given by St. Paul when he speaks of "Christ in you." That teaching is well known in India, where they proclaim that the nature of Brahman, the Absolute Divinity, is in all men.

This conception is fundamental in all that I shall say concerning what the Christ is trying to do in the world to-day. Let me therefore make clear to you that I believe that in all of us, from the most primitive savage to the most magnificent product of the highest civilisation, the nature of the Divine exists, just as the oak tree exists in the acorn. But in the primitive savage, the Godhead is like a God bound in chains; in a great Saviour of mankind it

is like a God who has broken his chains. From this standpoint which I am offering to you—that the Divine is in all of us—life, with its joys and griefs, with its victories and disasters, becomes the laboratory, the workshop, where we release our imprisoned Divinity.

If you accept such a conception of the soul's growth, you will very quickly see that if the Divine in man is to be released to the stature of the fullness of Christ, it cannot be done in one lifetime; you must postulate either that the work is continued beyond the grave in eternity, or in a process of returning to this earth where already exists the experiences necessary for growth.

WE ARE, THEN, GODS

in our essential nature, and as we live we are all busy at the work of releasing from his chains the Divinity within us. Yet though all of us, great and small, are essentially divine, there is a difference between us and the Christ. The difference lies in this, that among those who succeed in releasing the Divinity within them, there are some who voluntarily choose to perform a special act of sacrifice. That act of sacrifice is of such a stupendous

nature that the mind of man falls back when contemplating it. That is why it is so difficult to understand the nature of the Christ as both man and God. But very briefly summarised, it means that a human soul—one like ourselves—who has realised his Divinity and come to Perfection, as we shall all come, goes on still further in the unfoldment of his Divinity, and makes a great offering of sacrifice of love, of suffering and of devotion, with the object of standing towards mankind as a Mediator, and to be a Mediator means that he brings down into his own nature the indescribable glories of Divinity, and then veiling those glories, reveals them to mankind. It is a work not unlike what the mother does for the child in her womb ; she incorporates into her self the products of the earth, changes them into blood, and then sends it through the child to give him what he needs for his growth. Through her action, the child can live till he is a separate individual. In a similar way, he who is the Christ helps each soul. For long ago He chose to offer this magnificent offering, that of standing towards mankind in the relation of a Mediator. It is a relation indescribably stupendous, for everyone of the millions of men live in Him, and He is conscious of them all.

In the world to-day perhaps there are fifteen hundred millions of people living. What of the dead that have been? We calculate in our theosophical studies that the number of souls who form our Humanity is about sixty thousand millions of souls. Can any of us imagine the nature of the constitution of a person in whose consciousness all these sixty thousand million souls live, so that wherever they are—whether in the world of the living, or on the other side—he knows their thoughts, and to such an extent that, when anyone calls or looks to him, he responds? The thing seems incredible. It would surely be the Godhead Himself. Yet it is that the Christ worked for, and He has achieved it. Therefore to-day He lives in the world, with the world, not away from it. He lives here on earth, in a body of flesh; yet such is the nature of his consciousness, the glories of Heaven are also there with Him, surrounding Him.

The moment one makes the assertion that the Christ is here on earth, *has always been*, people ask: “Where is He? Can we travel and find Him?” For they are so steeped in a material conception of the soul and its functions that they think they cannot “see” Him fully nor He them, unless both stand face to face. Even if we did see Him face to

face, how many of us would be helped by that experience? How many of the Jews and Romans saw Him in Palestine, and yet did not "see" Him? And except the twelve, which of the great saints of Christendom saw Him with their eyes? Yet, *not* seeing Him, they "saw" Him so wonderfully that they became His messengers. No; we do not need to travel bodily to "see" Him; we must travel with our spirit. And since He knows every one of us whether our thoughts turn to Him or not, the finding of Christ is not a matter of looking upon the face of the body which He wears.

Here it is strange to me, as an Oriental, to hear that some Christians think that the greatness of the Christ—His all-embracing love, His instant presence wherever a soul opens the door to Him—would suffer a limitation if He lived in a body now, as He did in Palestine. They hold, as did Wilberforce, that just because He is no longer on earth, but is invisible to us in Heaven, since His Ascension, He is nearer to mankind. For they feel that for the Christ to have an earthly body makes Him less divine, less responsive to the needs of all millions of Christians.

All these fears are due to a lack of realisation in the West of what the Great Ones are. In India we

have still the traditions about 'Them, and we know that 'Their wonderful attributes are not lessened because They veil Their glory for our sakes, and live in human forms to help us. Thus, in Bhuddist legends, the Buddha was ever surrounded by Devas or Angels waiting to do His bidding. Every morning, at early dawn, He surveyed the world with His mystic powers to seek which particular soul among the millions of men needed His help most that day. Surely to-day, with our listening-in radio apparatus, we ought to understand ; to how many wave-lengths of radio stations cannot the best apparatus to-day "tune-in ?" If a mere mechanism can put us in touch with so many stations who send out their calls, can we not imagine that there may be processes in consciousness, unknown to ordinary mankind, but possessed by the Great Ones, which make Them instantly hear *every appeal* ?

SUCH IS THE CHRIST

that for the purposes of His work for men, He lives in a body of flesh, makes no difference to the fact that Angels surround Him to do His bidding, that on a thousand altars He reveals daily His

nature as the words of consecration are said at the Holy Eucharist, and that every cry that goes to Him is heard by Him whencesoever in the world the appeal is made.

Never a sigh of passion or of pity,
Never a wail for weakness or for wrong,
Has not its archive in the angels' city,
Finds not its echo in the endless song.

Because He is the Christ, the Mediator between God and man, all humanity is His, not only those who have been baptised into the particular faith which He founded when He was in Palestine. Because of what He is, all men are linked to Him, and He pours Himself out to all mankind along such channels as have been already established in the past and will be established in the future. Every religion is His religion : Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Mohammedism, Christianity. He pours out His loving tenderness and inspiration to all, irrespective of their creed, for the world is His, and all mankind is His, to be helped by him to a larger life. Like as a mother enfolds all her children within one embrace, so He holds within Himself all the faiths, great or small. What matter to Him the divisions into

religions and churches, for He brings the divine forces to all of them from on high. Like as certain electrical apparatus "step down" currents of tens of thousands voltages to lesser voltages which we can use without danger, so He "steps down" the powers of God so that we can assimilate them. That is His sacrifice.

And these forces which He "steps down" for our use are not of religion alone. The sciences and the arts, the philosophies and the mysticisms are also the result of His action to raise men up to God and to bring the Godhead down to men.

The Christ is ever at work. What is that work? To release the Christ in all men. As He is the Christ, and stands midway between man and God, as He is the revealer of the Divine to man in a way that you and I cannot yet be, He is striving to make every man a mediator too, after His likeness. It was not a mere mystical rapture of St. Paul when he spoke of "Christ in you, the hope of glory." As the Christ looks at us, He sees Himself in us, and that is why the whole world is His.

His work is to so organise the world that, stage by stage, cycle by cycle, the Christ dormant in each one of us may be awakened, until all men everywhere, of every faith, by whatever name they call

themselves, may live in the world conscious of the greatness of the Divinity within them. To organise the world—that is His work which I want you to grasp. The Christ whom I know is not one sitting in Heaven, surrounded by Angels, but one who is ever striving to organise the world, using for that the powers of Divinity which He has won by His sacrifice.

In this work of organisation, there is one particular part of it I would focus upon, and that is the work which He has been doing within the last century. During this period, you will find taking place a mysterious unification, by means of science and inventions, of the whole world. Relations have been developed, joining nation and nation, by telegraph and wireless, by railways and steamers, by books and journals, by lectures and travel. These relations have become so inextricably mixed to-day that we realise that, if there is any economic catastrophe in one country, it will affect the whole world. In other words, there has been taking place such a unification as has never been before, and it has not come about by chance. It is the result of a great attempt by the Christ, and by those working under Him, to bring about a type of civilisation that shall be for the whole world, when men shall

rise above the dividing lines of race and creed, and know themselves as brothers, working at a common purpose.

He has been organising long for this era that is yet to be. Such idealists as Wells, Shaw and others are dreaming of that future ; but that future is sure, for He is working for it, and though the success of it may be delayed by a generation or two, it is bound to come, for He has set His hand to the work for the love which He bears all men. And there work with him others, the Masters of the Wisdom, and those invisible workers whom we call the Angels. A mighty work is being done for all mankind, and He stands behind it, guiding and directing. He is not one sitting on the right hand of God the Father, merely receiving adoration, but one more busy, more active, and more full of work, than the greatest monarch or administrator, for He has to direct the organisation of the whole world and of all its departments, trying to bring together men of various temperaments and creeds and races.

As part of this work of His of ushering in the great world civilisation that is to be, there was founded in 1875 the Theosophical Society. For the work of unification cannot be brought about until

the world's ideas are changed ; that is why the Theosophical Society came into being, to mould our ideas towards a Universal Brotherhood. By showing what are the truths in common in all religions, the Society has broken down many a barrier that stood in the way of men working together for a common purpose. Started by two Masters of the Wisdom, who are His disciples and who have stood behind it, the Theosophical Society is the precursor of the great ideals of the future.

But the Theosophical Society is not alone in this work towards unity ; there are other movements too, the foremost of which is just now the League of Nations. Born under great difficulties, scarcely living at times, at least in the imagination of some, the League is yet the sole hope in many ways of the future, because it is the attempt to bring into the world's thought the conception of a world organisation, a world consciousness, a world dream, lifting men away from the narrow grooves of nationality into the wider idea of the world.

So then I say that the Christ is one who is moving in all the movements, who is watching politics, science, and art, who has His channels in every country and religion, who is above all the dividing lines which we give to things here below.

As anyone can see, all the idealistic movements are meeting with opposition to-day. Wherever this great attempt of His at world federation, world consciousness, world organisation, world peace is at work, little local dividing lines come in to belittle and to oppose. For even the most devout Christians do not realise that behind this great dream of a united world there is One to whom the whole world is alike, in whose Heart all the millions of the nations dwell.

His work meets with opposition, and thence comes the practical lesson from this address of mine. If it has any meaning to you, it should be this: that He whom you call the Christ, and I by that and by other names also, needs everyone of us for some part of His work. The politician, the statesman, the artist, the religious teacher, the educator, the business magnate, the men and women of daily toil, all are needed. There is not a single human being who cannot assist Him in the great work which He has planned of that Day to come, when we shall sweep past the dividing lines of nationality and creed.

Surely there can be nothing more inspiring to you as Christians—to you who consider yourselves nearest to him—if you could be convinced that He

lives here on earth, that he knows you are striving for idealism, that He stands behind all great unselfish schemes, and that they have His promise of success. You can see by the testimony of a few in these days, as in those of the Oxford movement, into whose consciousness a tiny part of His consciousness has passed, that He is very near. They realise that all life for them is changed. Your life too will change if directly, from yourself, you could come to certainty about these things.

There are millions in the West to whom the Christ is the symbol of all the highest they can possibly dream. But sometimes that symbol remains merely a symbol, and it does not come down nearer to earthly levels. But if you can realise that He is your elder brother, your Master, the Godhead manifest in you as you long Him to be, will not all your life be changed? How can you be certain about these things? I can suggest only a few ways.

Surely it is for your own Churches to suggest to you ways, is it not? Yet the Churches cannot; at least, most of them do not, or a vast majority of people think they do not. But there are other ways also, and it is because I have realised myself something of these truths about which I am

speaking to you, that I am going to suggest some ways with which you can experiment.

One way is to enter into this great dream of a work for all men, of one world and one scheme for all men, that is to say, not to allow any thought of nationality, or of your religion, or inward convictions to bar the door to the instinct within you to identify yourself with all that is noblest in the whole world of all peoples. That is not an easy thing; it is beautiful to contemplate as an ideal; but when you take up the daily paper and read about something that is done to your country, the subconscious of your nationality immediately introduces a warp to your judgment. If you will loyally stand by your hopes, and sacrifice whatever may be necessary for this dream of one world and one humanity, you will find various things happen to you, until you, in your own way, will know that the Christ *is*, and that He stands behind your idealism.

It is a great experiment. You will not find things easy; the kingdom of God does not open its doors to you mechanically; you must storm it. This work of finding Christ is the hardest, and yet the loveliest, work in the world, the only work to which your heart is set if you know where your heart is.

The second way is to identify yourself with your deepest sympathies wherever there is suffering. If one is suffering among your fellow men, surely you can help him even if you have only sympathy to give him. Did He not say : “ Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me ” ? Put that to the test ; do the least things for your brothers, but in His name, with a new sense of consecration, and see what follows.

There is one other way, of which I speak constantly, because it is to me very real. You remember how when He was in Palestine He loved children. Perhaps in some mysterious way, as He looked into their faces, He forgot the troubles which surrounded Him. And it is so still to-day, for wherever men love and serve children, whenever the child is looked at as one of the most precious mysteries that this world has, you will find sometimes that Another Person looks through your eyes at the child, and in a startled kind of way you will wonder, “ What is this ? I see in the child something I have never seen before.” That is because He is showing you.

Of course there are also mystical modes to be found in the churches ; in their great ceremonials

there are certain mysteries concerning sacraments. You can find Him through them if those modes appeal to your temperament. But those ways are not the only ways ; nor are these which I have described. For every Christian can discover some new way, and tell his fellowmen of yet another way that this great Lover of all mankind is ready to come down to live with men.

To understand the ways in which the Christ is working for the world requires an open-mindedness and an open-heartedness. Your best guide will be your own innermost instincts and intuitions, *if you are seeking Christ.*

It is perfectly true that to go on the path towards Him you do not need a church or ceremonies ; He will speak to you through the Christ in you, and guide you on your way. But along whatever path you go, it will never be easy. It will mean sacrifice after sacrifice, for you have to be as He is. You have to see His plan for the whole world ; you must be above all kinds of prejudices, as He is ; you have to put on almost the mantle of the Godhead yourself, if you are to stand by His side as His agent and mediator to the world. It is a magnificent destiny, but one which will require sacrifice. But every sacrifice will be full of joy, for you will know

that as a result of that sacrifice you are coming one step nearer to Him, your Master.

If you tread that road, He will give you your marching orders. They will not necessarily be the same as those for your neighbour, who also is seeking truth. He has His work also for those born in other faiths and traditions. Did He not say : "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold ; them also I must bring" ? He has His work for you and for every man who loves his fellowmen, for He stands behind all, and He is trying to release the bound Christ in all. But how and when He will give you His marching orders is between you and Him alone.

I can only give you the testimony that it will happen. If you are in earnest and willing to make the necessary sacrifices, you shall find Him, and then your life will be transformed. It is a way of difficulty, in some ways ; but also of joy realised, because you shall have the joy of struggling for His scheme for His world, and knowing that, when you seem to fail, in the sight of men, you will have succeeded, because He stands behind your endeavour and idealism. It is a hard life because you have to be His witness. The Greek word martyr means witness. You have to be His martyr for one world,

one humanity, one God, His martyr wherever you go, striving to bring into your heart the whole world with all its millions. It is a hard life, and yet not a hard life. As one of the Elizabethan poets has said :

His commandments grievous are not
Longer than men think them so ;
Though He send me forth I care not,
Whilst He gives me strength to goe.
When or whither, all is one ;
On His bus'nesse, not mine owne,
I shall never goe alone.

“ His business,” not your own. That means that you must make your daily life—in the office, in the market place, in your difficulties and in all that comes with them—His business. It is when there is that kind of union of your life with His life that you shall not go alone.

And so, Brothers, I want to give to you this message, that I too have known Him, that I know something of every splendour that your religion has declared concerning Him. But there are other splendours still, and the greatest is that He holds in His bosom all mankind without distinction of creed, sex, caste or colour. Out of all He is striving

to release the hidden Christ. He wants everyone of you to work for His scheme for one World, His world which shall be your world also.

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